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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002506

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH MFA

REF: QUITO 02193

Classified By: Jarahn D. Hillsman, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

1. (C) Summary: In her initial meeting with Foreign Minister (FM) Francisco Carrion on November 1, the Ambassador reaffirmed the importance of respecting constitutional bounds for reform, urged the MFA to revitalize the GOE inter-ministry working group on TIP, and reminded the FM that the GOE's reluctance to agree to Article 98 continues to restrict our support. Carrion emphasized the need for reforms by the constituent assembly. He expressed his dismay over the lack of development along the northern border, and discussed the need to develop a new bilateral framework for relations with neighboring Colombia.

2. (U) This was the Ambassador's first meeting with FM Carrion since he replaced former FM Parra, now ambassador in Madrid (reftel). The Ambassador was accompanied by DCM. Undersecretary for Bilateral Affairs, Susana Alvear, and Ambassador Rafael Veintimilla, Director of Bilateral Affairs, attended with Carrion. End Summary.

MFA Scheduling Appointments for Summit

3. (SBU) Carrion said that the MFA was busily processing last-minute bilateral meeting requests with Peru, Argentina, Brazil, and the United States in Mar del Plata. The Ambassador said a bilateral pull-aside was unlikely to be added to the US-Andean meeting, given scheduling conflicts. Carrion added that the Chileans and OAS Secretary General Insulza had requested meetings with Palacio. Carrion believes Ecuador's participation in the Summit of the Americas could not have come at a better time; issues such as governance, migration, and job creation to be discussed by the region's governments are of particular interest to the GOE. Carrion assured the Ambassador of Ecuador's unequivocal commitment to combat narco-trafficking and terrorism. He noted that he was Ambassador to Spain during the train bombings, where seven Ecuadorians lost their lives, and he understands that terrorism knows no boundary and Ecuador has a stake. He also expressed his fondness for the U.S. and for our way of doing business, adding that in his opinion the USG-GOE relationship is the most important one to Ecuador.

High Hopes for the Constituent Assembly

4. (C) Carrion is clearly supportive of President Palacio's constituent assembly. Carrion said that he has many friends in Congress, and has contacted them personally to press for their support for Palacio's initiative. He is hopeful that a new constitution will form the institutional foundation for a new Ecuador, allowing the GOE to better attend to the welfare of the people through better education and healthcare.

5. (C) Carrion asked for the Ambassador's opinion on the current political situation. The Ambassador said that the trajectory of the country is for Ecuador to decide; however, the avenue must remain within the bounds of the constitution. Carrion agreed, adding that Palacio hoped to deliver the proposal to Congress before he departed for Argentina (NOTE: Palacio presented his proposed referendum question allowing the voters to decide whether and how to organize a national assembly on November 2). Carrion believed that this would force the Congress to be responsive to the desires of Ecuadorian citizens in favor of overdue change.

6. (C) Carrion said a draft statute would accompany the proposal to Congress. The statute would outline the framework for the formulation of a constituent assembly, open to both political parties and civil society. It would also affirm that previous international agreements and the issue of dollarization would be "fenced off" from consideration in the constituent assembly. The newly reformed or created constitution would only take effect after January 15, 2007, allowing the current Congress, which would remain untouched in 2006, to debate and vote on the FTA.

Optimistic over Supreme Court

7. (SBU) The FM was optimistic that the Supreme Court process is progressing, adding that he believed it would be

up and running in a month or so. The Ambassador said that the formulation of a Supreme Court would be a critical step forward; and that the U.S. and the international community stood ready to help legitimize the new court.

Shocked by Conditions along the Northern Border

18. (C) Recalling his recent study tour of the Northern Border region, Carrion expressed his shock over the social, political, and economic isolation of residents there. Clearly moved by what he saw, Carrion insisted that a new constitution should address the needs of these "forgotten" people. He also acknowledged USG assistance in the NB region, and suggested that more was necessary.

Pushing for Progress on TIP

19. (SBU) The Ambassador took the opportunity to mention USG efforts against trafficking-in-persons. She briefed the FM on USG supported initiatives to help curb the problem, and said the GOE needed to do more to move off tier three next June. The GOE inter-ministerial working group was in disarray after continual instability in the Ministry of Government, and must be revitalized. Carrion, apparently unaware of the existence of the group, asked how he and the MFA could add real value to this fight. The Ambassador, suggested that the MFA consider chairing the group. Carrion was receptive to the idea, and said he would ask his staff to follow.

Forging a New Bilateral Relationship with Colombia

10. (C) Carrion said he would meet with Colombian FM Carolina Barco at Mar del Plata, and their vice-ministers would convoke a bilateral meeting later this month to negotiate a new framework for bilateral relations. The agreement would be signed in mid-December.

11. (C) The new framework, according to Carrion, would seek a greater focus on NB security issues, call for increased Colombian military presence along the Ecuadorian-Colombian border, demand greater GOC resources in support of the 250-400,000 refugees currently living in Ecuador, renew discussions on investment and trade, and make another push to get the GOC to halt aerial spraying along the border.

12. (C) The Ambassador discussed USG efforts to support the GOE in the NB region, citing investment in equipment, physical infrastructure improvements, and technical training. She said the issue of aerial spraying was a bilateral one between Ecuador and Colombia, but said the USG is convinced of the safety of glyphosate. The Ambassador explained that GOE reluctance to sign article 98 and the subsequent sanctions have impacted our ability to do more. Carrion said he understood, but countered that the current political climate made it impossible for the GOE to agree to article 98 requests.

Comment

13. (C) Carrion impressed us as intelligent and sincere. He seems much more likely than his predecessor to achieve progress in relations with Colombia by energetically working with Colombia to increase cooperation and understanding. He also shows greater vision, and has initiated an effort to deliver a plan for Ecuador's foreign policy through 2020. Carrion's meeting with FM Barco in Mar del Plata will be their second in several weeks. Parra met with her just twice in six months.

14. (C) Carrion's energy is a welcome change, as is his reasonable tone. Defense of national threats and his President are clearly paramount to him, but we will continue to enlist his support on TIP and other priority bilateral issues.

JEWELL